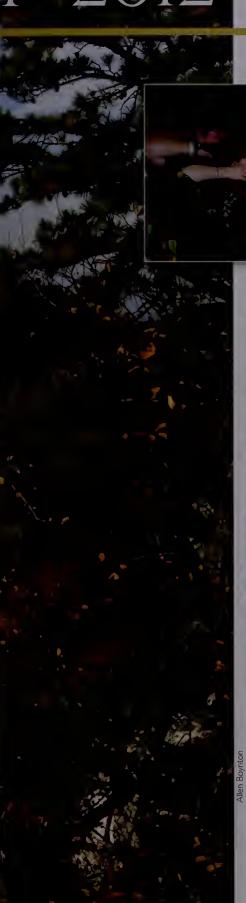






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BOB DUNCAN Executive Director

his issue of *Virginia Wildlife* holds special meaning for me. The opening feature on the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) coincides with the statewide tournament to be held this month at the Meadow Event Park in Caroline County. While Virginia did not "invent" NASP, our folks have sure perfected it. We now offer this introduction to archery in more than 500 schools statewide, involving more than two hundred thousand youngsters across Virginia. I have attended some of these events and they are absolutely thrilling. The support from parents, teachers, coaches, and volunteers is heartwarming!

The essay on mentoring a young hunter is also very meaningful to me. Most of us were introduced to hunting and fishing by a family member who cared enough to share their outdoors experiences with us. While my grandfather and father were the major influence over my love of hunting, there were in fact other hunters who served as mentors in types of hunting that were either new to me or not found in the area where I lived. I would not be the avid turkey hunter I am today without those thoughtful outings in pursuit of wild turkeys with veteran turkey hunters who knew what they were doing. I have heard all my life that if you really want to learn something, teach it to someone else. The chance to "pay it forward" and share with a new hunter is just as rewarding! I say this because the future of our hunting heritage really does hinge upon our success in introducing others to this cherished tradition.

Growing up in southwest Virginia during the days before we had quite as many deer and turkey as we have now, my hunting forays focused on squirrels and rabbits and my fishing centered upon smallmouths in the New River. The hunting and fishing stories in this issue bring back even more fond memories of those pursuits with my dad and brother.

Several years ago the Department broke a long dry spell when we were able to purchase the Big Survey property in Wythe County. One of the prominent mountains on the Big Survey is Sand Mountain, and I still have a photograph of the log cabin and my ancestors who lived in the shadow of this hillside along with other relatives from Ivanhoe, Piney, Fries, and Fort Chiswell. This relatively new wildlife management area feels like "the old home place" to me. It is situated in a spectacular region of our commonwealth, now protected to benefit wildlife and outdoor kindred spirits!

On another personal note, the closing feature about former game warden Capt. Darrell Ferrell is a very special one indeed. I was fortunate enough to work with Captain Ferrell, and he is a most remarkable individual. We can learn a lot from the captain, and others from his era, whose genteel nature and work ethic commanded great respect from those he served. So, hats off to Darrell for all he has meant to DGIF, our wildlife resources, and the sportsmen and sportswomen of Virginia.

February may be the shortest month of the year, but remember, this year is a leap year. That is most appropriate to note, since rabbit season lasts 'til the end of the month. Take advantage: Invite a new hunter out rabbit hunting and make a hunter for life!







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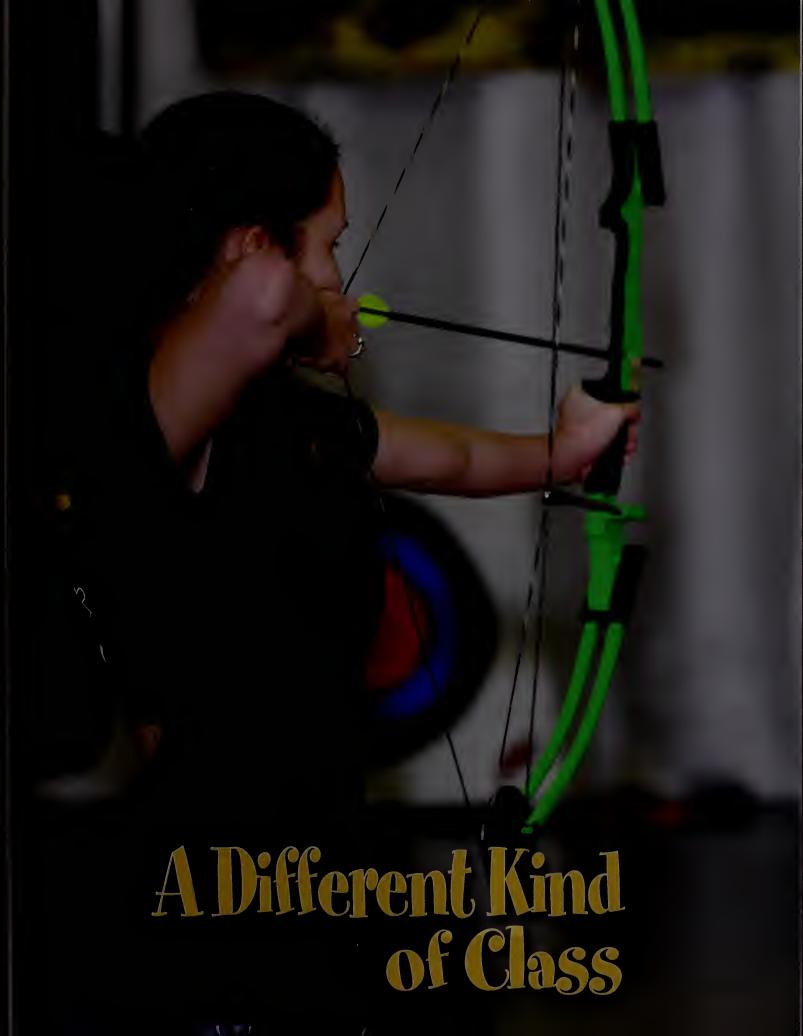
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VOLUME 73 NUMBER 2



A statewide archery program in Virginia schools draws an enthusiastic response.

story by Tee Clarkson photos by Lee Walker

he whistle blows for the first round of practice just as I come through the door. In an instant the building fills with a series of intermittent "thumps," followed by silence. "You may now collect your arrows," proclaims a voice over the loud speaker. Seventy-eight kids from across the state, spread out in a line perhaps 60 yards long, hang their bows on the rests and proceed toward the targets to check their scores. This marks the beginning of the National Archery in the Schools Program statewide competition.

Though the methods and tools were crude by comparison, archery (and the teaching of it) is as old a skill and practice as drawing on cave walls and fashioning tools from rocks. Today, rigid curriculums and standardized tests, 21st-century skills needs, improvement plans, and implementation of technology in the classroom make it hard to incorporate anything new into school studies where the benefit cannot necessarily be measured by data on a spreadsheet. Fortunately, though, through the hard work of many, students are benefitting from alternate in-school activities like this archery program, referred to as NASP.

The practice session has ended and the students now line up again, waiting for the call to begin their first official round of shooting. Each team consists of 16 to 24 members, including at least five members of the opposite gender. The tension in the building is now palpable as these arrows count toward the ultimate goal for each team and individual, that of qualifying for the nationals in Louisville a few months down the line. Just in front of where I am standing, a tall girl with brownish blonde hair draws her bow and lines up her first shot. Kensley Watkins is fourteen and a freshman at Lee-Davis High School in Hanover County. Kensley started shooting when she was in eighth grade at Stonewall



Students from Hanover, Albemarle, and Fairfax counties shoot an end from 15 meters.



Bruce Lovelace from Chickahominy MS demonstrates victory in the coaches' shoot-off.



Through a tremendous amount of passion and hard work, the National Archery in the Schools Program has taken off over the last decade since beginning in Kentucky in 2002. Virginia started the program in 2006 under the guidance of Karen Holson, who supervises outdoor education programs for the Department. With the help of school districts, sponsors, and teachers, Holson introduced the program to 90 schools the first year. Just five years later, over 500 schools across the state have introduced archery to



A student archer from Hidden Valley HS warms up by practicing with his string bow before going to the shooting line.



The tournament provides an opportunity for student archers to meet new friends and, at the same time, demonstrate focus and precision skills.

Jackson Middle School under the tutelage of her coach, Tommy Evans, a physical education teacher at the school. Evans was one of the first teachers to adopt the national program in Virginia nearly six years ago. Now he oversees the program at both the middle and high school levels. some 200,000 elementary, middle, and high-school-aged students. Karen attributes the popularity of the program to the fact that it "includes all kids, all abilities, all sizes, and all ages."

This is certainly evident as Kensley walks to the target to pull her arrows, scoring

an impressive 230 by the end of her turn. Just several archers down the line, Becky Townsend also returns with her arrows, edging out Kensley with a score of 254. Becky is a ninth grader from neighboring rival, Atlee High School in Hanover County, and the previous year, was the first middle school girl to represent Virginia in the nationals. While the rivalry between Lee-Davis and Atlee can get a little heated on Friday nights under the lights, one would never know it here. With the first round over and a break before they will shoot again, Kensley and Becky retire to a table together for a lunch break.

Bruce Lovelace, the coach for Atlee high and Chickahominy middle schools, is in his 33rd year of teaching, and was actually one of Tommy Evans's teachers. Like Tommy, he coaches both a middle and a high school team, something that seems quite common. Bruce started coaching for both as the middle schoolers moved on to high schools where there was no team. Many students did not want to give up the program, so Tommy and Bruce stepped in, volunteering their time. Atlee's team finds time to practice before and after school and over the holidays. Bruce says the best part of this "phenomenal" program is the broad range of kids that get to shoot and enjoy themselves. "It's not necessarily the top athletes," he says. "Kids find a hidden talent they weren't aware of."

At the table, Kensley and Becky compare scores and reflect on the program and their experiences. Kensley hopes to continue shooting through high school. "It's fun to be around the team," she says. "It's not about how well we do. It's about having fun, having a good time. Any girl can do it."



The "lunch ladies," AKA Hidden Valley HS coaches, put on their serious coaching faces.



Sixth graders at Chickahominy MS take 1st Place at the 2011 state tournament.

Becky Townsend also intends on continuing to shoot through high school. "I'm athletically challenged," she jokes. "This sport meets my needs. It's ideal." These two girls represent exactly what the NASP is all about, according to Karen Holson. "Anybody of any size, age, or ability can benefit from it. They can do it in the backyard." These two girls have certainly excelled.

As Kensley and Becky leave the table to prepare for their next round, perhaps one of the most anticipated moments of the competition occurs when the Hidden Valley High School team arrives on a bus from Roanoke. Hidden Valley High School adopted the NASP program early on and had tremendous

response from the students, but when their coach transferred to another school they were left in a lurch. The kids were upset, thinking the program was ending and they were losing the team. That is when Kim Stevens and Connie Waddell stepped in as coaches to help out. Kim and Connie work in nutrition services at the school and are referred to as the "lunch ladies." Shortly after, they were joined by Sherry Beamer, a special education teacher. Kim admits they got "lots of weird looks at the beginning. But once they got used to us and realized we were there to help, they got into it."

The lunch ladies have taken their role very seriously, hosting an archery camp during

the summer and putting on car washes, bake sales, and even auctioning off a ham at Christmas to raise money for the team. Just two years ago, the team from Hidden Valley finished first in the state. Kim echoes the same sentiments that ring throughout the building from both coaches and kids: "We just want them to do their best and enjoy shooting."

"We want them to have fun," she adds.

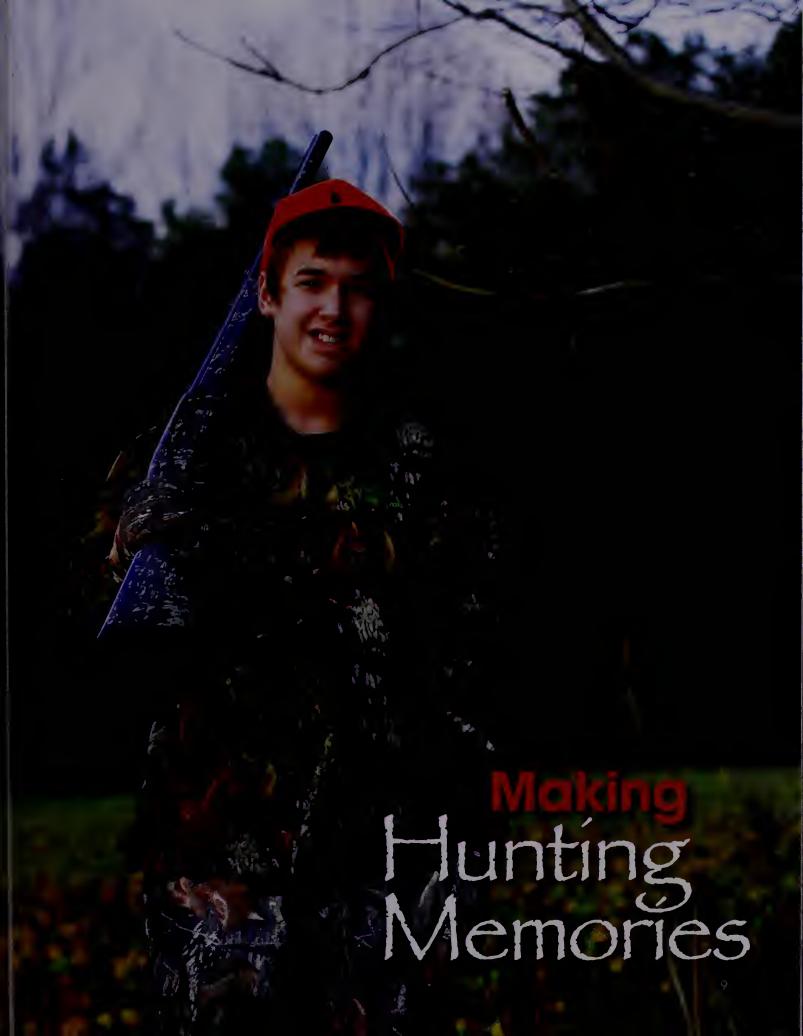
Undoubtedly, on this particular Saturday in February there are high school seniors around the state taking additional courses to prepare for the SATs. There are students visiting libraries, working on history projects, and solving calculus equations. All of these things have their place. Here at the Meadow Event Park in Doswell, however, the arrows continue to "thump" the targets. It is a sound that will be heard throughout this building into early evening and, with a little luck, a sound that will be heard in middle and high schools across the state for years to come, thanks to the NASP.

Tee Clarkson is an English teacher at Deep Run High School in Henrico Co. and runs Virginia Fishing Adventures, a fishing camp for kids: tsclarkson@virginiafishingadventures.com.

If your school wants to offer an archery program, please contact Karen Holson at (804) 367-6355 or email karen.holson@dgif.virginia.gov. The Virginia State Tournament is scheduled for February 25, 2012 at Meadow Event Park in Doswell.



Overall 2011 NASP Champion Archers are all smiles.



by Ron Messina

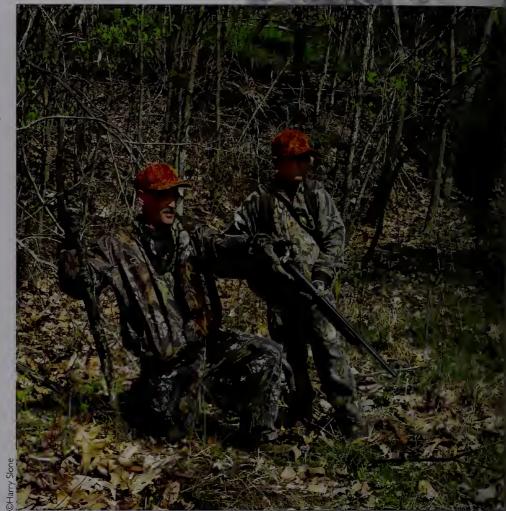
unting is part adrenaline, part religion, and a big heaping mess of cold, wet mud. There's no getting around the realities of frozen fingers, sharp briars ripping at skin, and long marches over uneven terrain before sunrise. It's the heat of dove season and oppressive mosquitoes throughout archery season. It's rain and snow. Hunting is hard. It's 4:30 morning alarms and, at the end of the day, tired walks back to the truck after dark. Hunting takes more than patience; it takes resilience.

Why on earth would anyone want to introduce an innocent youth to such trouble?

Maybe because hunting is much more than that. It's the deep blue on a wood duck's feathers. It's a buck appearing out of nowhere in the morning light. It's your dad teaching you to walk quietly in the woods. It's belonging to a piece of real estate, the one you happen to be standing in just as the leaves and the trees do. Each hunt teaches something. That's why bringing someone into this visceral world is akin to a tribal initiation. And why hunting memories take on special meaning.

A new favorite hunting memory of mine takes place on a perfect spring morning in May, on a high mountain meadow dotted with trees and surrounded by thick woods. A turkey is close and sounding off boldly in the sunshine, making that amazing call that spurs my heart to a gallop. Every time I draw the striker across the slate call he fires back, bringing the woods alive with thunderous gobbles. They're louder now. He's coming to the field edge, where a perfect ambush is planned, and someone means to do him harm. It's someone dear to me who's hunting for the first time, and I want this bird to come in.

Everything is still in the way it is before a shot. The gun barrel is nestled in the crook of a shooting stick, ready. The hunter is focused, the stage is set, but some intangible thing is not right. This bird is wary and never comes into shooting range; instead, hanging up at the woods' edge. It's an experience I've had before—to be honest, many times—and a bit disappointing. But for the one with me, the day still shines with perfection. That would be my student, my young padawan, my son Jon. He'd obviously been amazed by that sound, too.



Teaching a child to hunt can lead to a lifetime of cherished memories.

"That was exciting!" Jon whispers, putting emphasis on the word "exciting" when we finally speak. Through his headnet I see a smile in his eyes and I can't help but smile myself. Perhaps the student has something to teach the teacher.

It's not always the kill that leads to the thrill.

He takes the shotgun down off the stick. I consider how still he'd been for the past 25 minutes. If you don't think that's hard, try sitting completely still for half that long.

"Whew! My arms are shaking," he announces, pulling off the facemask, sandy brown hair flopping out. He's 10 and this is one of the first real hunts he's been on, and certainly the closest he's been to intense hunting action. Today he felt what it was like to be on point, ready to do harm to a fellow creature, in order to bring it to the table for his family. I could see the beginnings of a hunter in him, turkey or no turkey. This kid is going to hunt.



The author's old double barrel is put to good use by his son, Jon, in a swamp.



Learning to be safe in the woods is a requirement before a gun is ever fired. Jon receives sage advice from the author's friend and mentor, Harry Slone.

In hunting, as in many pursuits in life, it's the journey and not the end-game destination that truly matters. It's about doing it right, being safe, and being prepared. And to us it had been a successful and memorable hunt.

As Jon and I walk down the scenic Highland County hillside together we recall the events of the morning: hearing the whippoor-will call in the dark as we walked in; seeing a large group of whitetails gracefully crossing the meadow just 20 yards away, their coats ablaze in the orange-pink light of sunrise; watching a stealthy fox squirrel run along the edge of the woods; finding the skull of a small animal on the ground; and then ending the hunt with a close encounter with a gobbler. All in all, not a bad day to be alive.

Back at our cabin, we munch a few burgers and my mind wanders back some 30-odd years, through the deep woods of memory to another sunny day in mountainous western Pennsylvania. In this place I'm a 12 year old, a

lot like Jon, and it's my first real hunt—a rabbit hunt with my dad and older brother Joe. Our beagle Queenie, the finest rabbit dog in the county, is in full cry and has turned a rabbit back to us. My dad sends me ahead for the shot and, my heart pounding, I find myself looking down the brass beads of a brand new double barrel at my quarry. The rabbit making his loop back to the hunters has made a fatal mistake. It stops to look back toward the hound when I squeeze the trigger on that first barrel.

That textbook shot was my entrance into the hunting world, and I will never forget the smiles and handshakes from Joe and my dad, or the weight of that rabbit in my game pouch. They knew that—unlike my brothers Dave, Chris, and Mike, who'd not felt the calling—here was another hunter in the family.

Less than a year after that Highland County gobbler hunt, my young student finds himself stepping up into in a muddy duck blind with me, well before sunrise. It's a cold morning. We enjoy watching a meteor shower in a brilliant, star-filled sky with the only sound the occasional 'sploosh' of decoys hitting the water, set by friend Dave Hoppler. Shortly after first light, mallards swing over us, circling, close enough that we hear the air whistling through their feathers. Later, we would all shoot ducks. Jon would take his first animal, a hen mallard flying high above us. It was thrilling to watch him track the bird, make the shot, and in that moment connect the past with the future; to shake his hand and welcome him into the tribe of hunters.

Introducing a young person, especially a family member, to the sporting outdoors is like giving a great gift—and receiving it, as well. One can only imagine what memories this young hunter will carry with him 30 years from now.

Ron Messina is a videographer for the Department and an avid hunter.



Late Winter

It's never too early to hit your favorite river.

story and photos by David Hart

he first fish of the day came just minutes after Shawn Hash pushed his raft away from shore. He eased the boat up to an island in the middle of the New River, nodded toward a boulder, and suggested I drop my lure in the slower water behind the rock. I barely cranked the handle on my reel when the spinnerbait on the end of my line hit something solid.

"Snagged," I thought.

As I lifted my rod tip, however, the snag turned into a fish and began stripping line as it raced for deeper water. Not only was I into the first bass of the day, I was into a good one. Hash grabbed the net while I wrestled the fish back to the raft. A few minutes later, I placed the smallmouth on a measuring board and then proudly hoisted the 20-inch bass for my boat partners to see. It was just one of a dozen big smallmouths we caught that day, including another that topped it.

That's not uncommon this time of year.

In fact, there's no better time to cross paths with a trophy-sized smallmouth in any of Virginia's famous smallmouth rivers than right now. Based on citation records kept by the Department, you'd think otherwise. More 20-inch or better smallmouths are caught in the warmer months than in March or April, but there's a simple explanation for that: There are far more people on Virginia's smallmouth rivers in May, June, and July. Hash, a New River guide and owner of Tangent Outfitters, isn't surprised. Only the most dedicated anglers seem willing to brave the elements. Those that do, however, are typically rewarded with their biggest bass of the year; sometimes even two, three, or four citation fish in a single day.



Smallmouths

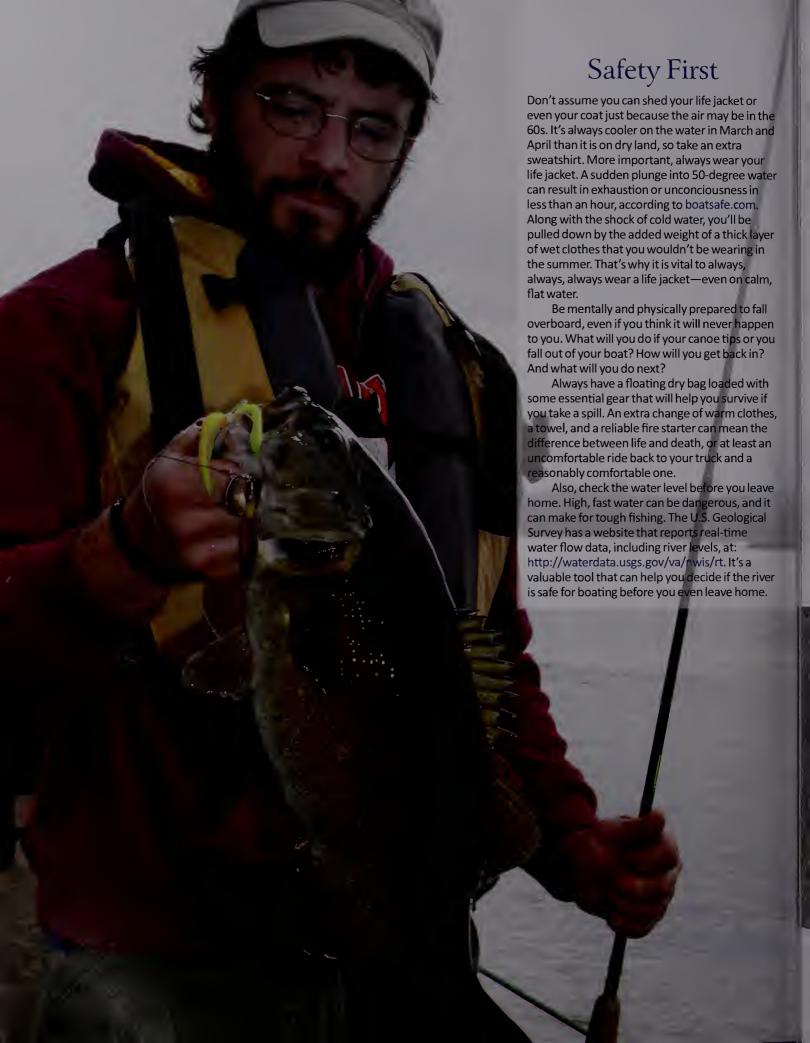
"You aren't going to have a 50-fish day in the late winter or early spring like you can in the summer, but the small-mouths are going to average much larger," says Chris McClellan, who was sharing the raft with me and Hash on that late March day last year. The angler from Rice continues, "It's as if every fish in the river is 15 inches or better. I have no idea where the small fish go, but we only catch quality bass in the winter and early spring."

Just days after our outing, McClellan and another angler boated seven bass over 18 inches, including a 21-½ incher, a trophy by anyone's standards.

(cont. pg. 15)



Top left, crankbaits are a top bait in the late winter or early spring. Make sure they dive deep enough to bump bottom, where the fish are. Above, during late winter, small-mouths often hug the sun-warmed shorelines and the good news is that most everything you catch will be a quality bass.



Time To Go, Relatively Speaking

Smallmouths gladly eat a lure just about all year long in Virginia. Hash has caught fish in 38-degree water, but they can be fickle creatures in the early spring, pouncing on lures one day and shunning them the next. A great day on the river can be followed by a tough one. While many hard-core smallmouth anglers pay close attention to water temperature, Hash is less interested in the specific temperature than a revealing trend.

"People ask me all the time what the river's water temperature is and I tell them, but that's not what's important this time of year," he insists.

Instead, Hash looks for a warming trend. It doesn't matter if the water is 40 degrees today, for example. He wants to see several days of warming weather that will ultimately increase water temperature a few degrees. If the water jumps from 44 to 47 or 48 to 50, it's time to go fishing. A difference of just a few degrees is enough to get the fish active and feeding.

That's not to say you need to monitor the water temperature on a daily basis. A glance at the weather forecast can tell you all you need to know. If the air has been in the low 40s all week and a three-, four-, or five-day warming trend of five to ten degrees is on tap, plan a day to float one of Virginia's smallmouth rivers. But plan it toward the end of that warming spell.

But it's not just a warming trend that can dictate success or failure. Water color is also important. Many dedicated winter smallmouth anglers favor chalky-green water, but plenty of big bass are caught in dirty brown water, which actually warms faster than clearer water. Just as Hash looks for a warming trend in water temperatures, he also likes a positive trend in color—water that is gradually changing from muddy to stained as the days progress. So does McClellan, who says that anywhere from one to three feet of visibility is ideal.

"Clear water can be tough because the fish can be real spooky, but you can certainly catch them in clear water. Dirtier water is better because they can't see your boat and have less time to look at your lure and decide not to eat it," he adds.

Lures, Simply Speaking

Fortunately, choosing the right lure for an early spring outing isn't complicated. Both anglers are big fans of crankbaits, spinnerbaits, suspending jerkbaits, and jigs. That's just about all they use in March and April.

"I'm using what most anglers consider largemouth baits. Most of the fish I catch this time of year are pretty big, so I think larger lures just help catch bigger bass," says McClellan.

He'll rig three or four rods with different baits, switching as the mood strikes him or as

he encounters water that just fits a specific bait. For example, a jig is ideal for deeper, slower holes, while a crankbait is the perfect lure to pull parallel to mid-river ledges. A spinnerbait can be fished just about anywhere, including right next to the shoreline or over shallower flats and behind ledges and boulders. Of course, all of those lures can be fished just about anywhere and there are no steadfast rules, especially at this time of year. The key is to try different baits until the fish tell you which one they prefer. One day, it might be a white half-ounce spinnerbait or a crawfish-pattern crankbait, while the next day, or even the next hour, the fish might want a quarter-ounce black jig and trailer crawled across the bottom or a chartreuse crankbait pulled through pockets behind boulders. Change lure style, color, size, and retrieve until you find the right combination. And don't hesitate to cast to unlikely spots. Winter smallmouths tend to favor slower water, but they will move as the water warms.

"We catch them on flats in a foot or two of water in the late winter, especially in the middle of the day when the water has warmed up a little more," says Hash. "You just never know."

When you do catch a bass, take note of the location, the depth, and anything else that might point to a pattern. Other bass may be lurking in similar areas farther downriver, allowing you to target locations. Remember, you'll probably only catch a few fish all day, so don't expect to get a bite every few minutes. That's just part of a late-winter smallmouth outing. Patience is one of the most important factors this time of year.

Just Go

Even more important? Mustering up the will—and a partner—to spend a day on the water. While Hash and McClellan have the luxury of choosing the days that offer the best overall conditions, they both admit that big bass will bite at just about any time. You just never know. In other words, if you simply can't stay indoors for another day, grab a friend, load up your gear, and head to the nearest smallmouth river. You just might catch the biggest bass—or two or three—of your life.



You'll only need 4 or 5 lures this time of year, but make sure you bring different colors and sizes. Left, Chris McClellan caught this 20-inch smallmouth in late March, one of nearly a dozen fish over 15 inches that day.

David Hart is a full-time freelance writer and photographer from Rice. He is a regular contributor to numerous national hunting and fishing magazines.



Rabbit hunter bonds are built around beagles.

by Ken Perrotte

rank Spuchesi was a hard-core deer hunter as a boy and a young man. He enjoyed still hunting, stand hunting, and joining in with hunt clubs as they used dogs to get the deer up and running. He even bought two tri-color beagles himself, intending to use them for deer.

Then his girlfriend, Stephanie, introduced him to her relative, Mickey Ford.

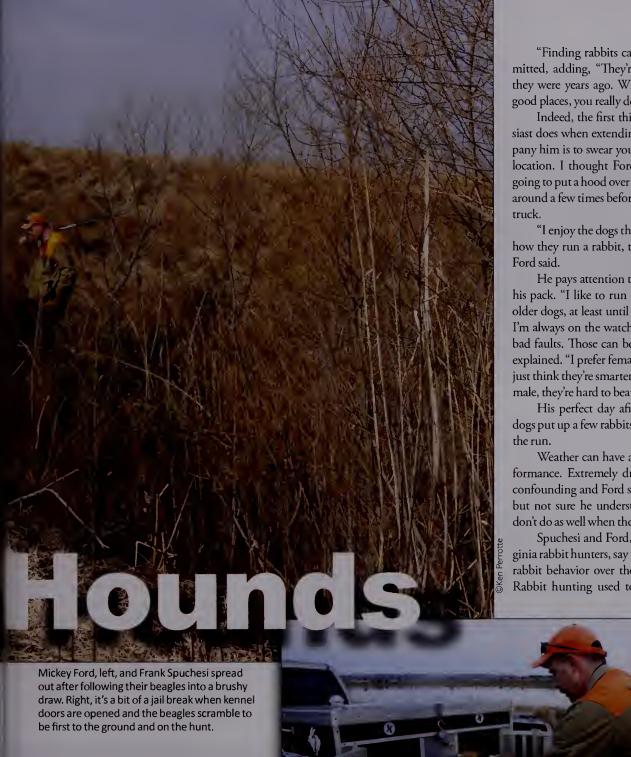
Ford, then in his early 60s, had just retired and he, too, was a die-hard hunter. Only he didn't give a hoot for deer hunting. His passion was running cottontails with his pack of beagles.

It only took one hunting trip with Ford, watching those dogs snuffle along the cool ground, crying out as they snorted the surely intoxicating scent of a rabbit, for Spuchesi to determine his two beagles had a higher, better purpose. Spuchesi now owns two rabbit dogs. And he and Ford have been nearly inseparable hunting partners ever since.

Today, Spuchesi is a senior conservation police officer with the Department, responsible for King George County. He has developed a reputation for staying on the trail of game violators as tenaciously as Ford's beagles follow rabbits.

Now 74, Ford found his beagle-rabbit calling in 1959 after he left the Air Force. He lives in Spotsylvania County but grew up in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, with both his father, Milton Ford, and grandfather Albert Wood imbuing in him the rabbit hunting tradition.

"I bought two male puppies—guess I broke them myself. I've had beagles ever since, sometimes as many as 16," Ford said. When he's hunting alone, he'll typically hunt seven dogs, but when he and Spuchesi join forces, they'll pool their pack into 11 or 12 dogs.



Rabbit hunting is increasingly a niche outdoors activity. It takes a lot of money to maintain a pack of dogs. Ford's preferred dog food has doubled in price over the past few years; the cost of veterinary supplies is another expense; and then there's the skyrocketing cost of fuel. Many of Ford and Spuchesi's hunting locations in the Northern Neck involve 90-minute drives from home. Ford also treks frequently to Maryland's Eastern Shore to find bunnies for his beagles.

"Finding rabbits can be hard," Ford admitted, adding, "They're not as plentiful as they were years ago. When you've got some good places, you really don't advertise."

Indeed, the first thing any rabbit enthusiast does when extending an offer to accompany him is to swear you to secrecy about the location. I thought Ford and Spuchesi were going to put a hood over my head and spin me around a few times before loading me into the

"I enjoy the dogs the most, what they do, how they run a rabbit, the noise they make,"

He pays attention to the composition of his pack. "I like to run my young dogs with older dogs, at least until they're two years old. I'm always on the watch for dogs picking up bad faults. Those can be hard to correct," he explained. "I prefer female dogs in the packjust think they're smarter, but if you get a good male, they're hard to beat, too."

His perfect day afield is one where the dogs put up a few rabbits and perform well on

Weather can have a bearing on dog performance. Extremely dry conditions can be confounding and Ford says he has also heard, but not sure he understands why, that dogs don't do as well when there is an easterly wind.

Spuchesi and Ford, as well as many Virginia rabbit hunters, say they've seen changing rabbit behavior over the last decade or two. Rabbit hunting used to involve jumping a



Frank Spuchesi hands Mickey Ford a nice Virginia cottontail. Below, the beagles fall into a line while trailing the fresh scent of a rabbit. The goal is for the dogs to stay in a tight group while on

rabbit and then standing fast while the dogs ran the rabbit. The rabbits typically ran a broken circle, ending up almost back in the same spot where they were jumped. Not so anymore, at least not with any of the certainty of bygone years.

"I don't think the rabbits come back as quickly or frequently as they used to," Ford said. "Sometimes you have to move up to get a shot. Sometimes they don't come back at all."

The rabbit hunters blame it on increasing numbers of predators, mainly coyotes and foxes that chase the rabbits year-round. Rabbits are evolving their patterns of response.

Neither Ford nor Spuchesi are big on field trial competitions, especially the hardcore events involving dogs trained just for success in the trials. They do, though, enjoy pitting their hunting dogs against those of other rabbit hunting enthusiasts in the new Battlefield Beagle Club events in Spotsylvania.

"The people who go to field trials are either serious hunters or serious field trialers. You don't often find people who are both," Ford explained. "The field trialers run their dogs a lot, usually in small packs, looking for faults. Those guys know what the judges like. One thing I've learned is you may have the best dog at actually hunting rabbits, but that dog may not do exactly what judges want in a competition," he added.

A "champion" beagle doesn't begin to fetch the prices commanded for top bird dogs, Spuchesi said. But a field trial champion

that also boasts proven hunting chops can get anywhere from \$600 and higher. Neither man breeds dogs to sell, although they sell a couple occasionally to keep the pack size manageable.

"One thing I've learned from Mickey is there's always a better dog out there. He's always on the lookout for that next best dog," Spuchesi noted.

The Hunt

One nice thing about rabbit hunting versus deer or duck hunting is that hunters can leisurely sleep in a little, have a nice breakfast, and assemble with plenty of morning hours remaining.

The beagles watched with expectant eyes from their boxes in the back of Ford's and Spuchesi's trucks on a brisk January morning. Once the tailgates dropped, beagles began baling to the turf, stretching legs, emptying bladders, and getting organized to sniff out a trail. It wasn't long before a seasoned female dog picked up a scent and let her pack mates know. The dogs, most of them anyway, began following her in pursuit of the rabbit.

"See that young male there," Ford said, waving his shotgun barrel toward a tri-color beagle looping ahead of others in the line to get closer to the lead. "He's 'skirting.' That's a bad fault and if he were in any competition, the judges would really penalize that. I don't want other dogs picking that habit up."

"Dogs tend to get classified as 'jump' dogs, the ones that usually get a rabbit up, and 'line' dogs, ones that aren't real crazy on the track, don't overrun the track. Typically, if they lose the track they'll figure it out and be able to go back and pick it up faster.

"The key is to have them working as a group," Spuchesi explained. "You want them



season, especially early on. Spuchesi's daughter, Amber, and Ford's grandson, Hunter Hall, have joined in on a few hunts. Only the kids carry the shotguns on those hunts, while the men monitor the dogs and mentor the youngsters.

Despite the many delectable recipes for rabbit, Ford says he only eats them about once a year now. "I like them pan-fried until brown and then simmered in water until tender. That and mashed potatoes and some bread is all I want," Ford said.

Frank Spuchesi is the only member in

Frank Spuchesi is the only member in his immediate family that'll eat the rabbits they shoot. "They'll eat all the venison you can put in front of them, but I guess the rabbits are too cute," he shrugged. "I don't eat them that much but I don't mind cleaning them and giving the meat to some close friends who enjoy getting it."

Temperatures rose by late morning and the dogs had put in a workout. Only a couple of rabbits were in the cooler and destined for somebody's frying pan, but that was of little consequence to Spuchesi and Ford. More important was the analysis of the dogs' performance. There were a couple of opportunities for improvement, but overall, the dogs made a few good runs, really staying with the game.

The two men loaded their four-legged partners back into the pickups.

"See you next week," Spuchesi asked as much as stated to his hunting partner.

"See you then. I've got a spot in mind," Ford answered.

Ken Perrotte is a King George County resident and the outdoors columnist for Fredericksburg's Free Lance-Star newspaper.



A rabbit chase is a great way to introduce kids to hunting. Right, Van DeBernard (L), Mickey Ford, and Frank Spuchesi relax and talk about their dogs' performances after a successful morning.

in a tight knot while running. The old man's saying is, 'You want to be able to throw a blanket over all of them.'"

"Mickey is very patient," he added. "He waits for the dogs to do their job. When the dogs are running, we hang tight. If they lose the rabbit, we let them figure out what happened, give them plenty of time."

Ford similarly expressed his admiration for Spuchesi, saying, "I enjoy hunting with Frank. He hunts the way I like to hunt. We never hesitate to go into the weeds to help jump the rabbit and we don't shoot the rabbits on the jump. The dogs have to run the rabbit."

They try to hunt twice a week during the





The View From

The Big Survey WMA protects prime wildlife habitat while offering spectacular views.

by Sally Mills

he far reaches of southwestern Virginia are known for the mining of lead and salt, industries born of the bedrock in their midst. For early settlers brave enough to eke out a living in the mountains here, a pioneering spirit and a willingness to help one's neighbors simply came with the territory.

It was just such a brave young girl, legend has it, who rode her horse one fateful night over the Walker Mountain pass to warn the town of Wytheville in 1863 that a brigade from the North was headed their way. As that story goes,

Molly Tynes saved the countless lives of neighbors and Confederate soldiers through this one act of heroism. Just in the nick of time.

A different act of heroism now reverberates throughout these hillsides. It also involves an unlikely story line and a small group of activists, among them a college professor and the Western Virginia Land Trust. Of course they didn't do it alone, but they were the spark. Their act of heroism saved thousands of acres of woodland and wildlife habitat. Just in the nick of time.

When all was said and done, the Shaffer family, the land trust (WVLT), the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, town of Wytheville leaders, state delegates, students, The Conservation Fund, this Department (DGIF), and Virginians from all walks of life who love this land pulled off a remarkable feat. They secured this mountaintop property called the Big Survey for the public in perpetuity; specifically, for its value to wildlife.

The story begins with a grant secured by the WVLT to study the land. Staff from the Division of Natural Heritage, with community financial support, stepped in to survey the area's rich biological inventory to help "make the case" for its purchase to create a wildlife management area. Among the fauna in need of protection: a rare moth (Catocala herodias gerhardi), the Diana fritillary (Speyeria diana), and the timber rattlesnake (Crotalus horridus).

Fast forward a bit, and after two years and many hours of public testimony and a series of hard-won victories, the property was acquired by the Department (DGIF) through a loan from the state general fund in 2001.

Profile of the Land

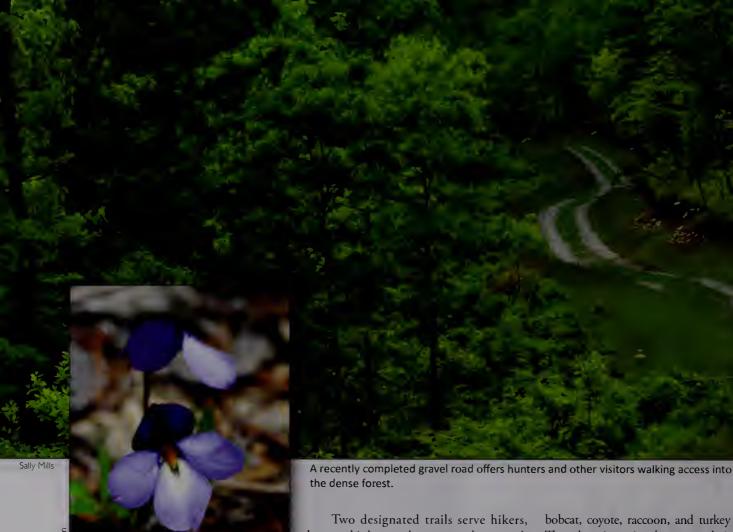
The Big Survey Wildlife Management Area (WMA) spans some 7,500 acres of mountainous terrain, accessible by footpaths of moderate to steep climbs. Hardwoods, especially oaks and hickories and black gum, along with several



under certain wind conditions, make for an ethereal trail

experience.

The view from Sand Mountain across the Wytheville Watershed is breathtaking any time of year. Above, flame azaleas light up the understory in late spring.





Birds-foot violet grows in the sandy soils of Big Survey. Diana fritillary (R) finds a home in the oak woodlands of the WMA.

Two designated trails serve hikers, hunters, birders, students, nature lovers; each offers a different perspective on the watershed.

- High Rocks Trail This 1.3-mile trail climbs 520 feet through lush canopy and rock outcroppings. The trail peak affords the hiker a spectacular view of the valley, dotted by the markings of light industry, the town of Wytheville, and surrounding farms.
- Tower Trail A more ambitious trail, this one spans 1,271 feet of elevation with some challenging climbs and large boulders to maneuver around. It also looks out to the windswept grasses of the valley below and, on a clear day, breathtaking views of the wooded ridges of southwestern Virginia.

A third trail on the property is gated and used primarily as an access road for maintenance and emergency vehicles. It does, however, offer an additional walking path for hikers.

On a detour off the High Rocks Trail last May, I was treated to evidence of deer, bear, bobcat, coyote, raccoon, and turkey tracks. Though unintentional, my wanderings also flushed a hen on her nest, revealing seven light brown, speckled turkey eggs beneath. Young fawns and squirrels were on the move that day, as well.

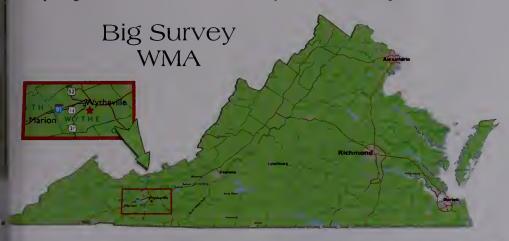
Allen Boynton is a manager in the Department's southwestern region and reports that he has observed scarlet tanager, ovenbird, great-crested flycatcher, red-eyed vireo, and blue jay, among others, during his periodic visits to check on the management area. During a hike with him, bright bursts of feathers above were seemingly mirrored below in the form of wildflowers gracing the forest floor. We came across several—pink lady's slipper, yellow star grass, and birdsfoot violets-amid blankets of delicate ferns. We hiked out before sundown, but I could imagine the night sounds of owls and whippoorwills, heard by neighbors, adding yet another layer to the mystique of this place.

On a subsequent hike this past fall, Boynton retraced our route and captured the outburst of colors of the autumn hardwoods. Those colors are repeated on the face of Walker Mountain, seen from the Tower Trail and well worth a drive along the Walker Mountain Loop of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife

A recently completed gravel road has been installed at Big Survey, thanks to a generous contribution by the National Wild Turkey Federation, federal aid dollars, and sportsmen's license fees. This gated trail provides visitors with walking access of two miles back into the wooded landscape from the nearby, High Rock parking area.

According to Assistant Bureau Director Rick Busch, installation of this road serves many purposes. Essentially, it creates a linear opening that offers new habitat for wild turkey and ruffed grouse broods and, at the same time, important edge habitat used by a host of wild animals. As Busch explains, "Wildlife strip openings cover more land-scape but with less square footage. Because of that efficiency, a project like this results in more bang for the buck."

Soil-stabilizing grasses have since been planted along the road bed and, with a little time, forbs important to wildlife will come back naturally. Periodic mowing and burning will be employed to keep the linear corridor at this low, successional stage of growth and prevent it from reverting back to forest.





Rhododendrons bloom throughout Big Survey during late spring, adding dramatic bursts of color against the large outcroppings of rock.

Management Plans

When the DGIF acquired Big Survey, its first order of business was to begin the process of phasing out some historical uses of the property to those that align closely with the Department's core focus on wildlife habitat. The process naturally involves getting information out to the public and other educational efforts to garner local support for the changes. In this case, according to Busch, the DGIF was very fortunate.

"We got lots of local support and voluntary compliance with our new management objectives. Once we explained our mission and why we were doing things the way we were, people generally came around. They know that Big Survey is now being managed primarily for wildlife, and they understand that all other uses, including recreational ones, must be compatible with that," he adds.

DGIF land managers and biologists carry on their work to enhance these forested hillsides and create habitat diversity, using the best science available. Several more linear openings are planned should funding become available, and trail maintenance continues.

• • •

Spend a day at Big Survey WMA and it is easy to understand why a small group of citizens would galvanize their energy into a remarkable showing of strength and commitment to save these hillsides and forests from any uses other than a natural area for wildlife. That they persevered when doors kept closing is a beautiful thing—like the very mountains they sought to protect. That they were successful is nothing short of a miracle.

Magazine editor Sally Mills enjoys any opportunity to get outdoors. She appreciates the loyalty of Virginia Wildlife readers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Big Survey Wildlife Management Area www.dgif.virginia.gov/wmas/ Includes a map, directions, and general information about the property.

Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail, Walker Mountain Loop www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/

Western Virginia Land Trust www.westernvirginialandtrust.org (540) 985-0000

Stand

by Bruce Lemmert

A look back at the career of Captain Darrell Ferrell, game warden.

n the spring of 1993, Darrell Ferrell bagged his first wild turkey. The year before, after thirty-seven years of service, Darrell had retired as a game warden. The good judgment and perseverance that had served him as a game warden helped in bringing this gobbler to the table. Asked why he hadn't pursued the wild turkey before, Darrell indicated that he just didn't think it was right, and he left it at that.

Law Enforcement Officers Training School

Certificate of Attendance

This is to certify that ____ DARRELL A. FERRELL attended a training course in general law enforcement held at

FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

with the cooperation of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

O. S. Ferrelia Superintendent of POLICE

Darrell Ferrell at his home in Falmouth, Virginia.



I interviewed Darrell in the home he built on Butler Road in Falmouth.

Darrell began building this house almost a half-century ago when he worked at Sylvania-Plank, a local plastics factory. The factory paid overtime, so Darrell worked as many hours as he could to help pay for building materials. Ours was a kitchen table interview.

Well, it really wasn't an interview; it was a confirmation. You see, I had been interviewing Darrell for over twenty years, and now it was time to determine if I had heard him correctly.

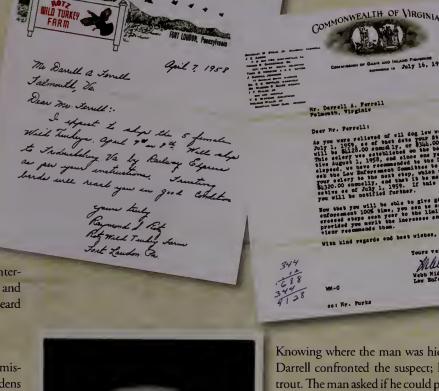
* * *

Darrell began work with the Game Commission in 1955 at a time when game wardens supplied their own vehicles, firearms, and work clothes. In addition to enforcing game and fish laws, these men were also enforcing dog laws. Initial training of this all-whitemale workforce consisted of self-initiated reading of the game and fisheries law book.

Game wardens of this era knew the community they worked and they understood the rural culture that included hunting and fishing. On an informal basis, Darrell learned all he could about fish and wildlife and, in 1957, attended a two-week training school for law enforcement officers.

The following April, Game Warden Ferrell coordinated the purchase and release of five wild turkey hens in Stafford County. The cost, financed by local sportsmen, came to \$109.97. These birds came from a "wild turkey farm" in Pennsylvania. Propagation of pen-raised wild turkeys has now been abandoned as costly and ineffective, but this joint effort with the community was being made in the good faith of the times.

Virginia Tech's Henry Mosby subsequently pioneered wild turkey research that proved that farm-raised turkeys were essentially livestock, despite their pedigree—not wildlife. Building on that conclusion, DGIF biologist Kit Shaffer led a trap and transfer program that helped re-populate wild turkeys across the state. The National Wild Turkey





Darrell Ferrell, circa 1960.

Federation has long supported and helped to enhance this more effective, enlightened approach.

. . .

In his long and illustrious career, Darrell lost only one case in court; he never called for backup; he didn't use handcuffs; and no one out-ran him. Common sense, community interaction, shoe leather, and the Golden Rule were his most valuable tools.

Darrell probably could have used handcuffs from time to time. On one occasion, while working the Piney River on the first day of trout season, Darrell received a tip that a man was fishing prior to the noon opening. Knowing where the man was hiding his fish, Darrell confronted the suspect; he had three trout. The man asked if he could put his fishing gear in the trunk of his car, which Darrell permitted. When the violator opened the trunk, he grabbed a jar of "white lightning" two-thirds full, chugged it down, smashed the empty jar to smithereens, and announced he wouldn't sign the summons.

As Darrell explained to me, "The whiskey was talking. He had his nerve medicine, you see." The man then let loose with a powerful mule kick with a large clodhopper that barked Darrell's shin from knee to ankle, drawing blood. Darrell was on him and told me, "I had that Army hold on him and I wasn't letting up. I told him if he kicked me again I would tighten up on him." The other game warden came with a car and Darrell put the man in the back-seat, hold intact, and they took him in.

Army training had served Darrell well. He spent four years in the service and left as a sergeant. Military fatigues were a by-product of Army life, and Darrell wore those khaki pants and green shirt in the field as a game warden.

The sidearm Darrell carried was .22 caliber, snub nose revolver on a .38 caliber frame. Those days, a box of .22-long rifle cartridges cost twenty-five cents and a box of shorts, fifteen cents. A Stevens, 12-gauge, double barrel shotgun was carried in the vehicle.

In 1956, the Commission furnished a winter uniform from the Penitentiary Industrial Department. The uniform consisted of two

STITCH IN TIME—Before hunting season opens each year, Game Wardens you have a least physical education classes in Spotsylvania, James Monroe and Stafford High. Scene above is at Stafford.

As shown in this 1959 clipping from the Fredericksburg Free-Lance Star, game wardens have always been closely involved in their communities.

pairs of trousers at \$17.75 each, one shirt at \$34.25, and a cap at \$4.50. Wardens were required to pay one-fourth of the total cost, which translated to \$18.56. This uniform was to be used for court appearances.

Chief of Law Enforcement Web Midyette notified Darrell in 1959 that, as of July 1 that year, dog law enforcement would no longer be required. This was a welcome relief to Ferrell. He had already told his supervisor, Stuart Parks, that if the dog work weren't dropped, he would look for a new job.

The family car, which also served as Darrell's work vehicle, was a light blue 1956 Ford with straight stick transmission and overdrive. The car had been bought new for \$2,600. After two years of driving back roads and offroad doing game warden work, the car was pretty beat up. It also had an odor that couldn't be sanitized away from the canine messes left in the trunk. Enforcing dog laws required picking up strays, unlicensed dogs, or those that had not had a rabies vaccination. Darrell kept a role of wire on hand for replacing taillight wiring, clawed out by the dogs on a regular basis. There came a point when Darrell's wife, Jo, was reluctant to ride in the car, so after two years of hard service, Ferrell sold the light blue Ford for \$250. His pay at the time: \$344 a month, which was twenty percent below the Virginia median household income.

Of course a month's work could easily go over two or even three hundred hours. Forty hours could sometimes be worked in two days. For example, it was not unusual to begin working early Sunday morning before the opening of hunting season and not get home until late Monday night. But Darrell said that

he was normally so psyched-up for the season he didn't notice the long hours. He was never paid for overtime.

Ferrell did miss a day's work one time. He was in the hospital having a compound fracture of his leg set and put in a cast. This was an on-the-job injury incurred when



Darrell with the first turkey he ever bagged, in 1993.

a riverbank gave way while checking a fisherman. With the cast on his leg, Darrell used a cane to work the clutch in his car. Since he couldn't walk very well, he used a 15-foot wooden johnboat with a 25 Johnson to check fishermen. The caulking job Ferrell had done on the boat did not make it completely watertight, so he occasionally had to throttle the Johnson to get the boat on plane, pull the plug, and let inertia drain the boat. This kept the boat and Darrell's cast dry. Darrell speculated that had the boat sunk, his leg cast probably would have taken him down with it.

. . .

In the late '60s, then-director of the agency Chester Phelps called Ferrell about violating policy. Upgrades in equipment had been grudging, but the game wardens had finally been granted Commission-owned work vehicles. They no longer had to use their personal vehicles on the job. When the low bid vehicles came in, the black Fords arrived with

air conditioning. As a gas and money saving policy, an order went out that the air conditioners were not to be used. Mr. Phelps asked Darrell if it was true that he had turned on his air conditioner. "Yes, it was true. I turned it on," the warden replied.

This policy violation didn't set Ferrell back too far. He was the first designated lieutenant in the agency and retired as captain of the northern Virginia region. His leadership

shaped Virginia game wardens for years to come.

Darrell always believed in a well-rounded approach to law enforcement. Interaction with people and public education were high priorities for this man who pioneered some of the first hunter safety courses in Stafford County. Those officers that persevere feel that they are doing something special. A game warden takes pride in making a difference, in doing a law enforcement task that will otherwise not get done. With Darrell's guidance and influence, the Commission's mission was promoted at community fairs, through local newspapers, and over the radio.

Darrell turned in his badge in 1992, upon his retirement.

In 2010, retired officers met at the firearms range to qualify for a law enforcement concealed carry permit. Darrell had broken his ankle some months before in a farming accident. He was now without cast but still somewhat hobbled. With a cane in one hand and a .357 magnum revolver in the other, at age 82 Darrell became the most senior person in Department history to qualify for the law enforcement, concealed carry, firearms permit. It was a sight to behold.

I served as a game warden under Darrell Ferrell for three years prior to his retirement. Darrell won me over with his humility and passion. He was unafraid. He looked down on no one; he looked up to no one. He had servanthood. Darrell's game warden career was a singular achievement that he justly takes pride in.

So much of the early game wardens' work depended on the individual in the job. For Darrell Ferrell it wasn't a job. It was a way of life.

Bruce Lemmert is a retired conservation police officer and a member of the Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society and the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.

AFIELD AND AFLOA



Outdoor Classics

Beth Hester

Attracting Native Pollinators: Protecting North America's Bees and Butterflies

The Xerces Society, foreword by Dr. Marla Spivak

2011 The Xerces Society, Storey Publishing

372 pages, Color Photos and Illustrations 413-346-2100

www.storey.com; www.xerces.org

"The work of bees and other pollinating insects often goes unnoticed, yet these tiny creatures have a profound impact on our daily lives. More than a third of our food supply relies on the plants they pollinate. The recent decline of many of North America's most important pollinators is something that everyone should pay attention to."

It's February, and many of you are in the process of plotting garden strategies. Whether you're daydreaming about entirely new landscape designs, tweaking existing patches of perennials, or trying to figure out ways to make your farms and orchards more productive, why not lend Mother Nature a hand, and think about simple ways to integrate pollinator-friendly policies into your approach.

Have you ever considered creating a bee pasture? What about setting aside part of the community garden specifically for pollinators? How can you enhance your flower beds to provide nectar and pollen for bees and butterflies, and provide host plants for caterpillars? What simple wildlife stewardship projects could your school or workplace undertake to promote native landscaping and attract pollinators? Did you know that you can create bee nesting boxes from scrap lumber? The creative possibilities are endless, and you only need a modest amount of space to make a genuine impact.

This vibrant and comprehensive new resource from the Xerces Society gives you an inside look at the world from the perspective of pollinators and shows gardeners of all skill levels easy and effective ways to improve pollinator habitat, thus increasing the overall productivity of green spaces. The information-packed chapters are thoughtfully organized—a personalized tour of 'Pollinatorville', if you will. From the biology of pollination and land management best practices, to the chapters on site selection, regional plants, and full-color bee, butterfly, and plant identification guides, this book is full of engaging scientific narrative and has virtually every bit of information you'll need to begin your adventures in pollinator-friendly gardening. The appendix is uncommonly useful, filled with project ideas for parents and educators, a glossary, a comprehensive listing of additional educational resources and where to obtain seed, DIY nesting materials, and pertinent publications.

Reading this volume is also the perfect late winter tonic. For me, I began to ponder the efficacy of producing native seed 'dirt bombs' to deploy over roadside ditches and abandoned lots, and I commenced thinking of how best to utilize my own scrubby patch of mid-town backyard. You might say I began to channel the spirit of Lady Bird Johnson.

But seriously, I'll close with a quote from Dr. Marla Spivak, Professor of Agriculture and Social Insects at the University of Minnesota: "Plant flowers. By creating floral and nesting habitat, bees, butterflies, and countless wildlife species will prosper. But through this same, simple effort, you will be ensuring an abundance of locally grown, nutritious foods and vegetables. You will beautify our cities, roadways and countryside. You will be spreading the word about the urgent need to reduce pesticide use, while at the same time creating habitat for the beneficial insects that prey upon crop pests... for many of our earth's environmental ills, you will be part of the solution."



NATIONAL ARCHERY SCHOOLS PROGRAM

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February 25, 2012

Meadow Event Park in Doswell, VA



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Twice Hooked

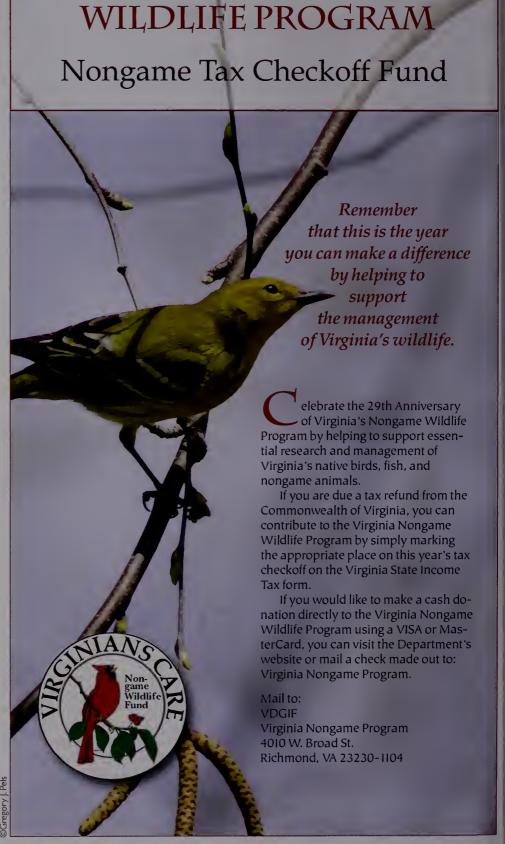
I know a bunch of fish stories have been told over the years, some true and some stretching the truth a bit. When a man has an opportunity to be part of one, it sure is special.

My stepson, Barry, gave me a call, inviting me to join him on a float down the Shenandoah last fall. We launched the boat around 8 A.M. that Saturday morning just under the Rte. 50 bridge and started down toward Locke's Mill Landing, a float of about 8 or 9 miles. The bite was on and off for the first three hours, and we caught several smallmouths, mostly in the 7- to 8-inch range. Barry was using a new line called "nanofil" with a fluorocarbon leader and told me he was not sure if the nail knot he used to tie the lines together was the correct knot. Shortly, he had a good hit on his line and reared back to set the hook, only to find himself with no fish and no leader and no lure. The knot had failed and the fish was lost.

We took some time to re-rig and continued on. A couple of hours later and another mile or so downriver, we anchored the boat and got out to fish. Barry's line went tight quickly, and this time he landed the fish. Immediately, he called me over. He opened the mouth of the fish to show me *his* lure, lost earlier up the river. The leader was still attached, and we could see where it had separated earlier when he hooked this fish. Since the fish had started to swallow the lure, we worked quickly to remove it and turn the fish free.

With that lure in its throat and the leader attached, there was no doubt it was the smallie Barry had hooked earlier (see picture). This is the first time I had ever seen the same fish hooked twice in one day, with over a mile of river between events! I know this story is hard to believe, but it is true.

This story was contributed by Bill Mitchell of Northern Virginia, who feels really good about being a part of this adventure with Barry.



VIRGINIA'S NONGAME



Nottoway River Gets a Boost

Biologists and staff from the DGIF and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service released close to 9,000 freshwater mussels into the Nottoway River in November, as part of a statewide effort to boost their populations and offset a declining trend. The mussels were raised at the VA Fisheries & Aquatic Wildlife Center at Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery in Charles City County and tagged before their release into the river. Tags help scientists track survival rates and spawning success of the stocked mussels and increases of native mussel populations already present in the river.

According to DGIF biologist Brian Watson, "Mussels remain one of the most imperiled groups of aquatic animals, which is

cause for concern. By filtering out nutrients and pollutants in the water, mussels provide a cleansing service that people, fish, and other wildlife depend upon. Healthy mussel populations indicate a healthy river system for wildlife and people—they serve as the proverbial 'canary in the coal mine.'"

Divers were also at work that day retrieving female mussels from the river to aid in ongoing propagation efforts at the hatchery. This attention to the Nottoway River represents an expansion of the mussel conservation program, once focused primarily in southwest Virginia, into waters of the eastern part of the state.

 $\neg SHM$



The 2012 Great Backyard BIRD COUNT

Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

February 17—February 20
Please join us!
www.birdsource.org/gbbc

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IMAGE OF THE MONTH



Congratulations go to G. Wayland Coates of Arlington for his beautiful image of a flowering Japanese cherry blooming along the tidal basin around the Jefferson Memorial. Wayland used a Sony Cyber-shot DSH-H50 digital camera, ISO 100, 1/60, f/7.1. Lovely textures!

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super high-quality prints, or highres jpeg, tiff, or raw files on a disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with our readers.

essay & photos by King Mon gomery

ack in school, I remember looking at a tiny drop of water in microscope. There appeared to be more *life* in that little drop than there was in the town where I lived. Single- and multi-celled animals and plants floated, swam, or flagellated from one side of the glass slide to the other. That was a long time ago, and these days I take my water watching in larger doses, usually while fishing, boating, or hiking.

There are many wonders in water in all its various forms and in the water-dependent ecosystems around it, of which we all are a part. "A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depths of his own nature," said Henry David Thoreau in *Walden* (1854).

I see and understand Thoreau's point, but most of my attention is focused not on the depths of my own nature, but on the water creatures themselves. When near water, I always have a camera ready and, while it's impossible to photograph your soul, an obliging frog, fish, bird, squirrel, butterfly, or beetle that holds its pose is another matter.

Our affinity with water—of which our bodies are over 75 percent—draws us to it, in part, because of our current dependency on it and our remote origins in it. Water has many moods, just as we have. It connects with the never-ending cycle of being born and dying, with life in between. We are an animal species, too, and we still must come to water—fresh, brackish, or salt—when the warm breeze ruffles the tranquil surface of the liquid world and we are drawn, and often soothed.

"We need the tonic of the wildness," remarked Thoreau, referring to what he learned at his favorite water-watching place at Walden Pond and along the Atlantic's shore, "to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest..."

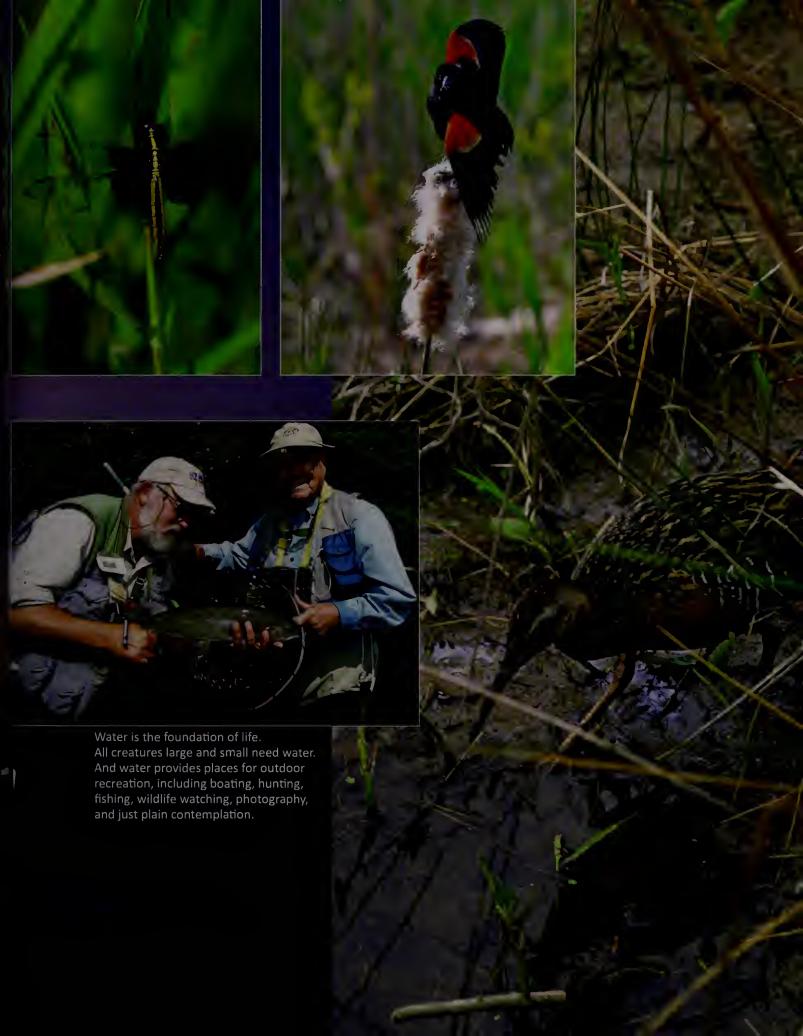
The next time you're near water, stop and have a seat on a rock, log, or the ground at water's edge. Do a quick scan of the surface from side to side and you'll see plenty of life: the Canada geese sliding onto the water for a landing; the mallard pair tipping down to munch the shallow aquatic grasses; the wild turkeys grazing the far shore; the dragonand damselflies darting to and fro; and much more. And then look down into the square yard or two of water closest to you. And stare. You will be transported and truly amazed at the natural wonders water has to share with your senses.

King Montgomery is a freelance outdoors/travel writer and photographer from Burke and a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife. Contact him at kingangler 1 @aol.com.





Mater is Life





l' Jones and I were spending a Saturday afternoon practicing what I do best—hunting and trialing. He uses a whistle, usually in combination with hand signals, as a way of communicating whenever I am supposed to retrieve something that is quite a distance away or if he and I are separated by some obstacle that prevents him from coming to where I am. If Jones blows the training whistle with one sharp blast, I know to stop, face him, and be ready for a hand signal. Teamwork for the both of us is sort of a tradeoff. Ol' Jones has learned that he is better off trusting my nose than his eyesight when locating a pheasant, so he only has to have a general idea of where the bird went down.

Each hand signal starts with Jones facing me with the flat of both palms of his hands together about chest high, in what you humans may call the "prayer position." This is more than appropriate, because if you have ever participated in a field trial or hunt test, you know there is often more praying going on at these events than an old-time Elmer Gantry tent meeting. "Please Lord, let my dog get a good mark," or "Please Lord, let my dog remember the location of the third mark," or other such incantations.

When I am sitting at a distance facing Jones and he wants me to go to his left (my right), he throws his left arm straight out to his left, like some over-caffeinated traffic cop, and yells "OVER!" The flat palm of his left hand is facing me. I then run to my right and try to find what we are looking for. The same thing applies if he wants me to go to his right (my left) by throwing his right arm out to his right and yelling the same thing. If he wants me to go back farther from where I am, he shoots his right arm skyward, like the smart kid in his high school algebra class who always knew the answers, and yells, "BACK!" As always, the flat part of his palm is facing me. I, in turn, move farther away from him. This signal has been hard for Ol' Jones to master because he never raised his hand in algebra

class *or any other class for that matter*. During the four years of high school, I am pretty sure his hands never came out of the prayer position.

If, by some chance, I over-run the bumper or bird, Jones will blow a sharp "STOP!" whistle and then, once I have stopped, will toot three quick times on it. That means "COME HERE!" and lets me know I am supposed to come toward him. When he gives the "STOP!" whistle blast again, I know I am in the area where he needs me to be.

We have both practiced these signals so often that all I need to see is the direction his hand goes and I know what direction I am supposed to go. The only whistle blowing, therefore, is just the STOP toot or the three COME HERE toots.

Now I know that you sports-minded humans like to believe that lessons on the field, such as teamwork, will carry you through life and all that, but not in every instance, as Ol' Jones related to me after one of our recent training sessions. "You know, Luke, we work pretty well together and we don't have to say much to each other at all. I thought early on in my marriage that if my wife and I could have the same kind of teamwork, we'd get along just as well as you and I do," he confided. "One night, when she was in the kitchen making one of her great Italian dishes, I thought it would be great if she would bring me a glass of wine before dinner. So, I gave her three sharp blasts on the whistle and waited. She didn't come. I waited and gave her three more toots and she still didn't respond. I thought maybe she was deaf or something, so I went back to the kitchen to see what was the problem. It turns out Italians from Philly also know a few hand signals. Her signal has a slight variation from the "BACK!" signal we use, but I understood exactly what it meant."

> Keep a leg up, Luke

ATTENTION YOUNG WRITERS

The Virginia Outdoor Writers Association annually sponsors two writing competitions for Virginia high school students (grades 9-12) and undergraduate students attending a Virginia college or university. Awards of gift certificates, outdoors gear, and cash are offered for winning entries.

Go to www.vowa.org for contest guidelines and other details. Then grab some paper or a laptop and get to work!

Deadline is February 13, 2012.





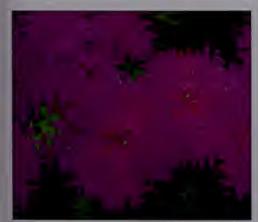




The Clone Stamp Tool is awesome for getting rid of annoying things in a photograph. Here, you can see a pistil sticking up in the upper right of the photograph. I want it out!



Here, I have removed the pistil using the Clone Stamp Tool. Much better!



The Wave filter was applied harshly here but you can apply less or more of the effect since you have full control!

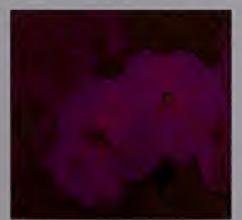
Y es, it's cold outside! Maybe, instead of shooting images, you could work on the ones you've already taken by using a software program called Adobe Photoshop CS5.

The software that normally comes with your camera might be good enough for basic needs, like cropping and exposure correction, but Photoshop offers a world of creative tools that the average camera software can't even touch! While the upfront cost is nothing to sneeze at, this is a program that you will really appreciate over time. Here are just a few examples of some of my favorite applications.

Dodge and Burn Tool

Back in the old days, I can remember standing in the Associated Press's darkroom in Richmond, exposing photo paper under an enlarger and using all sorts of weird tools to make the best print possible. My favorite tool for the job was a bent wire coat hanger with a circular piece of cardboard attached to the end. This "dodge" tool was waved over a print during the exposure to keep light off of an area, thus making that area lighter in the final print. You could also "burn" areas, and for this, it was normal to use your hands.

Today's Photoshop has a tool box with a wide assortment of tools, two of them being the dodge and burn tools. Ironically, the symbol for dodging is a circle on the end of a coat hanger and the burning symbol is a hand.



The Colored Pencil filter was fun to play with as well.

(Too funny!) These tools give you full control over the amount of dodging and burning you apply to an image and are so much easier to use than the steps involved in darkroom work.

Clone Stamp Tool

This great tool allows you to copy an area and paste it over another area. This is awesome if you need to cover something up like a telephone line or copy and paste something into a photograph.

Filters

Filters are found in the Menu Bar at the top of the window, under Filter. When applied, these tools can make a photograph look like a Monet painting, a charcoal drawing, or a spinning swirl of color. Filters are so much fun to play with that they can become quite addicting. I have spent hours experimenting with how the different effects influence my photographs.

So when winter has you in its grip and keeps you from shooting pictures, why not give Photoshop CS5 a try? Enjoy!

Lynda Richardson's Photography Workshops

All classes are held at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Go to www.lewisginter.org to register and look under Adult & Family Education or call (804) 262-9887 X322 (M–F, 9AM – 5PM).

Photographing Winter Wonders on February 9, 11, 16. Learn how to find exciting photographic opportunities in the winter landscape.

Advanced Flash Clinic on March 15, 17, 22, 24, 29. Know how to use your hotshoe flash? Learn to use more than one flash, and more!

Making the Most of Your Digital Camera on April 18, 21, 25, 28, & May 2. Learn the various settings on your camera and how to make them work for you.



Rabbits Make for Classic Winter Meals

nce the throngs of deer hunters have left Virginia's woods and farmlands, the rabbit hunting faithful with their packs of beagles typically take to the field. Depending on the terrain and habitat, rabbit hunting can be surprisingly demanding for both dogs and hunters or it can be as easy as a stroll along a brushy fence line. As with any game, quick and proper handling in the field helps the rabbit transform into a tasty, mild-flavored ingredient in the kitchen.

These two recipes deliver very different results and flavors. Rabbit cooks much like a mild, white meat game bird, such as pheasant. Pay close attention to the meat as it cooks. You want it cooked through, but not dried out. The size rabbit being cooked has a bearing on the amount of time needed in the skillet or the oven.

Rabbit with Garlic Potatoes

1 rabbit, about 1-½ to 2 pounds, cut into 6 or 8 pieces 7 baby red potatoes, cut in half 6 or 7 garlic cloves, halved if large Olive oil 3 slices thick-cut bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces ½ teaspoon rosemary ½ teaspoon black pepper Dash of salt

Preheat oven to 400°.



Toss potatoes and garlic with 2 teaspoons olive oil and roast for about 15 minutes in a shallow baking dish large enough to also hold the rabbit pieces. Meanwhile, cook the bacon in a large skillet over medium heat with 1 teaspoon olive oil until it starts to brown and render its fat. Remove the bacon and set aside.

Pat the meat dry and then brown it in the same skillet, several pieces at a time, adding olive oil if necessary. Add the meat and seasonings to the roasting pan. Cover, reduce heat to 350°, and roast for about 20 minutes. Remove the cover, add bacon, and cook another 10 minutes, until rabbit is cooked and tender.

Garnish with fresh rosemary. Serve with a favorite side of vegetables and a glass of light red wine, such as a Pinot Noir, an Italian Sangiovese, or a French Beaujolais.

Braised Rabbit

1 rabbit, about 1-½ to 2 pounds, cut into 6 or 8 pieces ½ cup flour
½ teaspoon each, salt and pepper
3 or 4 tablespoons olive oil
1 cup sliced onion
2 cups sliced mushrooms
1 tablespoon chopped garlic
2 cups chicken stock
½ cup dry white wine
2 fresh rosemary sprigs
1 bay leaf
1 tablespoon butter, softened
1 tablespoon flour
Salt and pepper, to taste

Season the flour with salt and pepper and dredge the meat in the mixture. Sauté the rabbit in 2 tablespoons of the oil in a Dutch oven, several pieces at a time, until browned on all sides. Add more olive oil if needed. Remove the meat.

Add a tablespoon of oil and sauté onions, garlic, and mushrooms until soft. Add meat back to the Dutch oven and add the liquids. Cover and place in 350° oven for about 45 minutes, until meat is tender. Remove lid and add bay and rosemary. Simmer on the stovetop for about 10 minutes. Remove the bay and rosemary.

Combine the butter and flour and whisk in the mixture to thicken the sauce. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve over noodles or rice. Accompany with a chardonnay that has had some toasted oak barrel aging.

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